This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

619

Maitland

יהוה

HELPS TO BELIEF.

MIRACLES.

HELPS TO BELIEF.

MIRACLES.

BY THE

REV. BROWNLOW MAITLAND, M.A.

CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED:

LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK & MELBOURNE.

1886.

37.429

PREFACE.

IT has not been without a sense of the inadequacy of the space for the treatment of so large a subject as "Miracles" that the following pages have been written. The argument which the author has endeavoured to unfold is rather an outline, the details of which remain to be filled in, than a complete exhibition of the grounds of belief.

At the same time, he has felt that the case on behalf of the Christian miracles is considerably simplified by declining to defend them on the ground chosen by the sceptic, who severs them from their moral environment, and weighs their improbability as independent facts against the testimony produced in their favour; and by treating them,

on the contrary, as organically connected with the doctrine of Theism and the living force of Christianity. They are thus lifted out of the mechanical into the moral sphere; and the more profound is the inquirer's appreciation of the gracious fatherhood of God, and of the spiritual power which the doctrine of Christ has wielded, and is still wielding, in the world, the more convincing will he find the evidence for the supernatural phenomena amidst which Christianity claims to have taken its rise.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.—CONCERNING THE WAY IN WHICH CHRISTIANITY IS CONNECTED WITH MIRACLES, AND THE KIND OF MIRACLES FOR WHICH IT IS RESPONSIBLE 11

CHAPTER II.

ANTECEDENT OBJECTIONS TO MIRACLES 31

CHAPTER III.

THE POINT OF VIEW FROM WHICH THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES SHOULD BE APPROACHED 58

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES 77

CHAPTER V.

THE DIRECT EVIDENCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES 94

CHAPTER VI.

OTHER BIBLICAL MIRACLES.—CONCLUSION 115

MIRACLES.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.—CONCERNING THE WAY IN WHICH CHRISTIANITY IS CONNECTED WITH MIRACLES, AND THE KIND OF MIRACLES FOR WHICH IT IS RESPONSIBLE.

WHOEVER undertakes to exhibit the evidences of Christianity, and to answer objections to their cogency, that by this means he may secure an earnest and practical acceptance for the doctrine of Christ, necessarily finds himself at the outset confronted by the question of miracles. The sacred books of Christianity cannot be opened without the starting forth of the miraculous from their pages. The primitive creeds of Christianity

cannot be recited without the assertion of miracles falling upon the ear. The conception of Christ Himself, as held by all the Churches of Christendom, is from beginning to end supernatural. Miracles, in one form or other, are entwined with the Christian religion with such closeness of adhesion and intimacy of admixture, that they cannot be torn away from it without leaving it a shapeless wreck. The only possible alternatives are—a miraculous Christianity, or no Christianity at all that is worth the name. Hence, among the lines of defence which the Christian apologist needs to draw around the "Faith once delivered to the Saints," there must be one which shall make good the Christian miracles against all objections, whether to their possibility, their credibility, or their reasonableness and value. To sketch out such a line, in a short and simple manner, is the object of the following pages.

In order to see clearly the nature and limits

of the subject, two preliminary questions demand consideration. *First*—In what manner is Christianity connected with miracles? *Secondly*—Of what kind are the miracles to which it is committed? To furnish answers to these the present chapter will be devoted.

In regard to the former, the true reply will, I think, be most satisfactorily indicated by pointing to the fact that Christianity is founded on an alleged revelation from God, which is of an essentially historical character; that is, a revelation which is embodied in facts and events lying within the sphere of the visible world, and forming a portion of its history. I do not base the connection of Christianity with miracles on the assumption that miracles are the indispensable letters of credit of the inspired man of God, and that it is practically impossible for God to make Himself known without the instrumentality of miracles. The abstract propo-

sitions, that a revelation is to be received, independently of any inquiry into its contents, because it is attested by miracles; and that no revelation, whatever its substance may be, can have a just claim on our belief in the absence of confirmatory miracles, seem to narrow unduly the methods in which God may be pleased to manifest Himself, and also to be at variance with the express teaching of Scripture, as well as with the voice of our moral sense. In the sacred records we read of many a prophet who received communications from above, and was persuaded of their Divine origin without the aid of any miraculous attestation to their authority; and whose message, when he declared it to the people, penetrated their consciences, and carried conviction with it, although no miracle was wrought to enforce its claim to be believed. Of this we have a signal instance in the case of the greatest of the pre-Christian teachers, the immediate

forerunner and herald of the Gospel. He did no sign, yet all men held him, and rightly held him, to be a prophet, and doubted not that all things which he spoke of the Lord Jesus were true.[1] Our Lord Himself claimed for His teaching a self-evidencing power, such as would lay hold of the hearts of loyal seekers after truth, and convince them that He was sent from God, and had the words of eternal life.[2] Nothing could show this more decisively than His solemn declaration uttered in the final crisis of His life: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."[3] It was in accordance with this principle that in the course of His public ministry He used to appeal to the spiritual judgment of His hearers—"Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" "It

[1] Matt. xxi. 26. John x., 41. [2] John vi. 68.
[3] John xviii. 37.

I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth the words of God; for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God."[1] When asked for attesting signs He refused to give them, and reproved the craving for miracles.[2] Adherence to Him, which rested simply on the superhuman powers visibly exerted by Him, He studiously repelled and discountenanced.[3] So far, indeed, from support being afforded by the Bible to the notion that miracles are the indispensable and sufficient proofs that a revelation is true, in both the Old and New Testaments the case is contemplated of false teaching being attested by miraculous signs, against which the faithful servants of God would need to be on their guard.[4]

These brief references to Scripture are

[1] Luke xii. 57. John viii. 46, 47.
[2] Matt. xii. 38, 39; xvi. 1–4.
[3] John ii. 23–25; iv. 48.
[4] Deut. xiii. 1-5. Matt. xxiv. 24

sufficient to show that the connection of Christianity with miracles is not adequately accounted for by the principle, that every revelation from God must of necessity be accompanied by miracles to prove its Divine origin and authority. The true explanation needs to be sought in the nature of Christianity itself, as being not so much a system of doctrines as a historical religion. The moment we look into it, we become aware that the miracles do not lie outside it, as vouchers to be examined before it is accepted, but inhere in its very substance as parts of the revelation on which it is founded. Christianity centres in the Person of Christ—is Christ, in a sense to which no other religion furnishes even a remote analogy; and from beginning to end He is set forth as a unique, a supernatural, Personage. According to the Christian faith, He is the Son of the Eternal Father, who was sent into the world to manifest the Father to mankind. He spoke the Father's words,

wielded the Father's authority, did the Father's works, offered Himself to the Father in the death of the Cross, was raised on the third day to immortal life by the Father's might, and was taken up into the glory of the Father to become the Head of the Church, the Ruler and Judge of the whole human race. The entire conception is above Nature; it is all supernatural, all miraculous, from first to last. The miracles, properly so called, which were wrought by the hands of Christ in manifestation of His Person and office were but parts of the one great miracle of Christianity, which is Christ Himself. The crowning miracle of the resurrection, which gathers up all the rest, completing them, and placing the seal upon them of absolute and final perfection, was itself but the necessary consequence of Christ's personal relation to the Father, and His office towards mankind. The incarnation, the subsequent life with its marvels of power and grace, the sacrificial

death, the glorious resurrection and ascension; these events, these facts, displayed on the theatre of the world, and narrated historically in the sacred Gospels, hang together in one comprehensive and indivisible whole, and that whole is miraculous. If, then, the miraculous were inadmissible and must be refused credence, the entire Christian revelation would disappear with it. No Christ would, in that case, be left to us. The man Jesus might remain; but the Son of the Father would have vanished, and the Gospel would have shrunk into a fable. Christianity, thus deprived of its only bond of coherence, would fall to pieces, and become numbered with the wrecks of worn-out beliefs.

From this view of the connection of Christianity with miracles, it follows that Christianity carries its own peculiar miracles with itself, in the sense that whatever is evidence of the Divine authority of the doctrine of Christ is also evidence of the miraculous

element which is bound up inseparably with that doctrine. We have no need to take the miracles as some isolated or external appendage of Christianity, and construct an independent proof of their reality, apart from the system of doctrine in which they are embedded. If to the Divine mission of Christ an unparalleled attestation is borne, alike by the antecedent preparation for His coming, the historical environment of His earthly career, the character of His teaching, and the immense results of that teaching in the world at large, the whole of that attestation belongs equally to the miraculous element in Christianity, and contributes to form its title to our belief.

Such is the connection of Christianity with miracles, a connection not of logical proof, but of inherent character and historical fact. The question which has now to be examined —To what kind of miracles is Christianity committed? — will obviously depend for

its answer on the considerations already adduced.

We have seen that, according to the Christian belief, the miraculous element in Christianity was the immediate consequence of God's revelation of Himself in His Son. God, in fulfilment of His gracious purpose towards mankind, interposed in human history by sending His Son into the world,[1] and the miracles grew out of that interposition, to which, in fact, they gave the visible form and fashion in which it was made manifest to the eyes of mankind. From this it follows that a miracle, in the Christian sense, is the manifest sign, token, and consequence of a special interposition of God in the sphere of this visible world for a purpose of grace. As to its cause, it is an effect of the Divine Will. On its lower side, it is an event outside the ordinary sequences of Nature. On its higher side, it has a spiritual

[1] Galatians iv. 4.

character, and is an instrument of the moral government of God. For no alleged miracle which fails to fulfil these conditions is Christianity responsible.

The limitation of the character of the Christian miracles, thus laid down, is of the utmost importance in the controversy respecting their historical reality, and the reader's attention is especially entreated for it. It relieves them from the accusation of antecedent improbability. It lifts them up from the physical to the moral order, from God's action in Nature to His higher action in grace. It places them securely within the one great primary assumption upon which all practical religion depends. These consequences of the definition will come out at length in the subsequent discussion. For the present it will be sufficient to note the following immediate results of the Christian idea of miracles.

First. If the miracle is an effect of the

Divine Will, it presupposes the existence of God. His existence is the initial assumption, without which to discuss miracles would be futile. This will be readily seen, if we suppose the reality of some asserted miraculous event to be debated with a person whose belief is confined to the physical order alone, and who does not acknowledge any spiritual or supernatural order lying behind and above the physical. Such a person might be so pressed by unquestionable testimony as to be constrained to admit that some extraordinary event has occurred, for which his present knowledge of physical forces and laws does not enable him to account. But to the demand, that he should therefore confess the finger of God working in that event outside the order of Nature, he would undoubtedly be entitled to reply, that to ascribe the event to some natural cause of which he was ignorant must be far easier, and far more in accordance with

probability, than to invent, for the sole purpose of explaining it, a transcendent and infinite Being in whose existence there was no other reason to believe. If the entire order and beauty of the physical universe failed to impress upon him the conviction of a Divine Author and Upholder of it, still more must any single occurrence, any isolated phenomenon, even though it were ever so apparently exceptional or eccentric in its character, fail to convince him. God is assuredly more clearly and more impressively manifested by the regular and majestic procession of the great cosmic order, than He could be by any petty interruptions or breaches of it. Hence we are bound to approach the Christian miracles with the admission, that they rest upon the assumption that there is a God; and not merely a God who may be regarded as an expression or personification of physical law, but a God who really Wills, and who is free to act

according to His Will; that is, a personal, living God.

Secondly. From the part of the definition which lays down that miracles, in the Christian sense, are effects of the Divine Will, it follows that the reality of a miracle cannot be completely established by human testimony alone. There is in every truly miraculous event an essential element which is immaterial and invisible, and to which no eye-witness can possibly depose: that element is the cause. For a miracle, properly so called, is not a simple, but a compound event. It consists partly of an outward visible fact, which the witnesses can see and attest, and partly of an invisible spiritual fact, which faith alone can perceive. If on one side it belongs to the physical world, on the other it belongs to the viewless world of spirit. When, therefore, we take in hand to ascertain whether, in any reported case of an extraordinary event, a real miracle has been performed, we require

something more than satisfactory testimony of the occurrence of the alleged perceptible event. Over and above the event, supposing that to be established, we need an interpretation of it, an addition to it of the unseen secret cause. The testimony can never reach to the miracle unless it calls to its aid a previous assumption which no testimony can establish. Before the testimony, however trustworthy and cogent it may seem to be, can carry us into the actual presence of miracles, we must have antecedent grounds for believing that the Divine Spirit, the Divine Will, is moving and acting behind the veil of matter, and may be reasonably expected to manifest its energy for some special purpose within the sphere of the senses. Whence it follows that to treat the question of miracles as being simply and exclusively a question of the degree of reliance which may be rightly placed on human testimony, is to neglect an important part of the mate-

rials requisite for a complete induction, and so far to vitiate the conclusions to which such a method of inquiry may lead.

Thirdly. It is to be noticed that the definition avoids all the perplexing questions which have been raised about the precise relation of the Christian miracles to the laws of Nature, whether by that term is meant the physical forces which act in Nature, or the sequences of events which are produced by them. So long as the miracle is acknowledged to be a result of God's interposition in the visible sphere, it matters not whether it is styled a violation, or a suspension, or a modification of natural law or order, or is ascribed to some quickened action or new direction imposed on the same forces as those which lie behind all physical phenomena of the ordinary kind. The definition does not even make it necessary to hold that the Christian miracles, indiscriminately and without exception, were miraculous in the strict scientific sense. No

philosophical conception of the miraculous, discriminating it sharply from the natural, is to be found in our sacred records. Nor could it have existed at a time when the scientific idea of Nature had not yet been formed in the human mind. The term *sign* is that by which our Lord's wonderful acts are most frequently designated in the Gospels. They were tokens of the heavenly kingdom which He proclaimed, indications of the spiritual powers which He wielded among men. If it were to turn out that in some of these signs the apparent breach of the uniformity of Nature was apparent only, and not absolutely real; that this or that miracle did not lie altogether outside natural laws, but was only an instance of the operation of some higher and hitherto unknown physical cause; still, so long as under the actual circumstances the sign was adequate to witness of the Divine interposition, and to illustrate the purpose of grace in connection with which it was

wrought, so long would it come within the definition of the Christian miracles, and subserve the same end as much as if it had been in the absolute sense an interference with the order of Nature.

Fourthly. The definition excludes all alleged miracles which are merely prodigies, monstrosities, inexplicable anomalies, without significance in themselves, or without vital connection with the course of God's moral government of the world. With miracles of that sort, whether ancient or modern, whether embodied in early legends, or clustering round relics and shrines of the present, the Christian apologist has no concern. He has no interest in preventing their being attributed to ignorance, superstition, or craft. It is consistent with his position to allow that no testimony could render such miracles credible. They lack altogether any antecedent probability, any moral justification, whether derived from the circumstances in which they are

reported to have happened, or from the consequences which have flowed from them; and in the absence of all such qualifying and recommendatory features, their intrinsic improbability may well be esteemed too great to be overbalanced by any conceivable amount of testimony to their occurrence. Our experience of law and order in God's universe creates a presumption against such miracles, which may be confessed to be practically insurmountable.

CHAPTER II.

ANTECEDENT OBJECTIONS TO MIRACLES.

HAVING cleared the way for our discussion by examining what Christianity is really pledged to in regard of miracles,—in other words, what the miraculous element is which the Christian apologist has to defend—our next step is to consider and test the strength of the *à priori* or antecedent objections which have been raised against belief in miracles generally: that is, the objections which are levelled, not against the Christian miracles specifically, or against any miracles in particular, but against the entire conception of the miraculous, when it is put forth as a fact which can reasonably enter into the domain of human belief. These objections may be ranged under the following heads:—

First, miracles are in themselves impossible. *Secondly*, if theoretically possible, they are intrinsically incredible. *Thirdly*, if in the abstract they are possible, and even credible, practically they are incapable of proof. I will take these three objections in the order here stated.

I. The assertion that miracles are in themselves, and by the essential nature of things, impossible, is of a metaphysical, not a scientific, character, and may be said to have become obsolete in these days of positive and experimental science. A few words must, nevertheless, be devoted to an examination of it.

It is obviously founded on the assumption that the physical order of the universe is so fixed and determined by an unalterable necessity, that no power in heaven or earth can produce any variation in it, or deflect it in the smallest degree from its natural course and progress. But a miracle, if it were to happen, would be an event outside that order, a

momentary variation of it, an interruption of its regular sequence; hence a miracle, it is urged, by virtue of its essential character, is excluded from the category of things which can be esteemed possible.

Now, if we ask how we can obtain any assurance that Nature is so bound by an iron necessity that no variation of its customary order can ever take place, we wait in vain for an answer which will bear a moment's examination. Such an assurance certainly cannot be derived from our experience. All that observation can do is to discover that which actually is; about the absolute necessity of things, or the possibilities which underlie them, it is unable to tell us anything. To assert that no power exists which is capable of interfering with the physical order, is equivalent to asserting that there is no God; and who of the children of men has so exhaustively explored the entire universe of being, and ascertained all the forces which act in it,

as to be in a position to make that stupendous affirmation? If there be a God, the physical order must be His handiwork; and if He is its originating cause, to deny Him the power to modify it would be absurd.

In short, the idea that miracles are in themselves impossible has no ground in human knowledge or experience, but is a mere figment of the speculative intellect. There is little difficulty, indeed, in imagining some sort of universe, such that there shall be no room in it for the miraculous; but the incompatibility of miracles with any such creation of the fancy is no proof whatever that miracles cannot happen in the actual world in which we find ourselves existing. In this real world there is not, within our knowledge, a single law, sequence, or event of which we are able to affirm the intrinsic necessity; and if we believe in God at all, we must also believe that miracles are not outside, but within, the possibilities which lie before His sovereign

Will. A God who could not control the order of Nature would be no God at all.

II. The theoretical possibility of miracles being conceded, the second objection starts up in the shape that they are intrinsically incredible. In other words, that although we may believe that God could perform them if He willed to do so, we have such sure grounds for thinking that He will not, that we may be certain that no miracle has ever occurred.

This objection rests upon a particular conception of the Divine character, as putting a restraint upon His Will in regard to the exercise of His power. God, it is pleaded, is not a changeable Being, who can be thought of as acting irregularly and fitfully, now in one method and now in another. His line of action must be uniform, undeviating, without variation or special adaptation to emergent circumstances. He is not like an artificer of imperfect power, skill, or foresight, who may need from time to time to interfere with his

machine, to correct its defects or to adapt it to new conditions which he was unable to foresee. Miracles, by virtue of their essence, are changes of operation, afterthoughts, remedies for defects, and are, therefore, inconsistent with all that we can conceive of the Divine immutability, omnipotence, and omniscience. In a word, we degrade God when we portray Him as working miracles of any kind or for any purpose whatever.

Now, it must be acknowledged that there would be a great deal of force in this objection, if only we could banish from our thoughts the moral government of God and the whole of His relation to mankind, and could limit ourselves to regarding Him solely as the upholder of the material universe. In that case we could scarcely help deriving our entire conception of Him from the physical system with which we are conversant. Seeing the uniformity of Nature, the regular linking together of causes and effects in all the

ordinary sequences of physical phenomena, we should be led to transfer the same kind of invariability to the Divine action, and to conceive of God simply as the mechanical Power which originally constructed the material cosmos, and now sustains the laws which He was pleased at the beginning to impress upon it. But it is clear that to think of God in that manner only would be to degrade Him below the level on which even the most meagre and rudimentary natural theology places Him. When we say that we believe in God, we do not mean solely, or even chiefly, to express a belief that there is some ultimate force or power which upholds the visible framework and order of Nature. What is foremost in our thoughts is that we ourselves have a heavenly Father, a Father of our spirits, who cares for us as His children, rules over us in righteousness and mercy, and trains us for fellowship with Himself. This moral relation of God to us belongs to

the essence of any theism which is adequate to satisfy our hearts. Neither a metaphysical God, nor a God who is the God of Nature alone, is sufficient for us. We require a God who is heart to heart with us. And the moment this higher and truer conception of God takes possession of our minds, the objection against miracles, founded on the assumption that they are inconsistent with the Divine attributes, loses its force and disappears. In our *moral* conceptions, our ideas of right and duty and goodness, there is absolutely nothing to support the notion that unbroken uniformity and regularity of action, irrespective of circumstances, is a just criterion of excellence in dealing with rational and responsible creatures. We are sure that the moral transcends the physical, and that God's fatherly relation to us is immeasurably more important than His function towards the physical world. To know God, to be brought into harmony with Him, to have

His eternal moral law written indelibly upon our hearts, that we may be lifted up into fellowship with His Spirit—these are objects which are of infinitely greater moment to us than the sustaining of thousands of suns in their brightness, or the peopling of millions of worlds with irrational creatures; and if to promote these ends it is expedient that God should at any time draw aside the veil of matter, and manifest Himself in the visible sphere by those interpositions and works which we call miraculous, we cannot for a moment doubt that He will do so in the manner most effectual for His gracious designs.

It is true that those who urge against miracles the objection under consideration also protest, in the name of philosophy, against the conception of God which I have opposed to it, and stigmatise this conception as *anthropomorphism*, the fashioning of an ideal God in the likeness of man. But in making this

protest, they appear to forget that they themselves derive their conception of God from a still lower source—the inanimate creation, and are really fashioning their God in the likeness of *matter*. Possibly they may be betrayed into this absurdity by the ambiguity of the term "Nature," which is sometimes used for the whole cosmos inclusive of man, and sometimes for that part of it only which is inferior to man. But nothing can be clearer than this, that when they frame to themselves a God whose character limits Him to acting with the undeviating and blind uniformity of physical law, and call this the God in whom Nature teaches us to believe, they are really excluding man from their idea of Nature, and are taking account of no more than the lowest portion of the complex system of Being, the inanimate elements which lie at its base. On no other supposition can they claim to be following the voice of Nature, when they set up what may be called a

physical God in preference to a spiritual one. And when one fairly looks in the face this method of obtaining an idea of the eternal Maker and Lord of all things, it cannot fail to stand before us self-convicted of a monstrous absurdity. Man walks in the midst of the natural world as its supreme flower and crown, the latest and most marvellous of its constituents, alone endowed with personality and freewill, reason and conscience. In every inquiry into the origin of things *he* has to be accounted for, as well as the phenomena of matter and the laws of their combination and succession. In every induction from Nature to its unseen Cause, man must of necessity be not only included, but form the most indispensable, the most significant, of all the contributory elements. If, then, in ascending from Nature to Nature's God, we are bound to carry up with us the ideas of order and regularity which the physical world suggests, much more are we bound to carry upwards to the

throne of the universe those higher ideas of self-determining Will, intelligent purpose, and moral affection with which humanity furnishes us. And if we do this, the God at whom we shall arrive will certainly not be one of whom we can antecedently pronounce, that under no circumstances can it ever be His Will to put forth His hand in special acts, and interfere with the common order of the visible system. Let man be included in Nature, as he must be for the purpose of rising from Nature to God, and the God to whom Nature will lead us will be a Being in whose eyes the moral order is infinitely superior to the physical, and to whom it will be no self-contradiction to manifest Himself even by miracles, if miracles should seem to His perfect wisdom the best means of conveying to His human children that knowledge of Himself in which stands their eternal life.

There is, indeed, one conceivable method of evading the force of these considerations, but

it can only be adopted at an immeasurable cost—the cost of everything that gives man his dignity and worth. If man were denied the self-determining will which constitutes him a being capable of morality, and were thus reduced to the level of things which are completely subject to external law and physical force; in that case I confess there would no longer be any ground for the induction which leads up to a God who acts freely, and rules His rational creatures in righteousness and love. Then, indeed, the whole argument for the credibility of miracles would vanish, but with it would vanish also morality and religion. The controversy would be ended by the perishing of all that imparts to it meaning and interest. So long, however, as man walks the earth as a free agent, moulding the physical order by the action of his will, modifying and directing for his own purposes the operation of natural laws, in such varied ways and on so vast a scale as to change the face of the

world and the destinies of nations; so long must it remain a climax of absurdity to deny to the God who made man a similar freedom, and to bind him down to a blind subjection to the laws which He Himself imposed on the material universe.

III. We reach now the last of the three antecedent objections to miracles. They may, it is urged, be in theory both possible and credible; but practically, even if they occur, they are incapable of being proved.

Now if by this objection it is merely intended that miracles cannot be satisfactorily and entirely proved by *human testimony* alone, unsupplemented by any other evidence, I have already assented to the statement; and I would extend it to include even the testimony borne by his own senses to the eye-witness of the miraculous event. The ground of this incompetence of testimony is, as I have already remarked, to be found in the composite character of a miracle, which consists of

two elements of very different kinds: a sensible fact of an extraordinary character, and an invisible, supernatural cause of the fact. To the eye-witness himself his senses certify nothing beyond the external fact; the cause of it is supplied by his mind and judgment. When he testifies to others of the occurrence of the miracle, it is the external fact alone which rests upon his veracity; of the cause he can only give his opinion. Those who hear and accept his witness to the fact are as free as he himself was to form their own judgment as to its cause. Hence neither to the eye-witness himself does the miracle rest simply on the testimony of his senses, nor to others does it rest solely on the veracity of the persons who attest its occurrence.

But between the incapability of the miraculous to be proved by testimony alone, and its incapability of being proved at all, there is an immense gulf. Given the external fact, of such an extraordinary character, that the

observer of it is unable to discover a place for it in any natural sequence of events, or to affiliate it to any physical cause within his knowledge; there may be, in addition to the testimony of his senses, evidence of a totally different kind,—evidence, that is, of a moral character,—which may supply what the senses cannot furnish, and may be so cogent as to constrain him to believe firmly that the event is truly supernatural, and indicates a direct interposition of God in the visible sphere. What the objection, taken in the sense now discussed, overlooks is the probability of evidence of this latter kind; by which, in combination with ocular observation, or the testimony of eye-witnesses, the miraculousness of the strange event may be reasonably and sufficiently proved.

What is more commonly meant, however, by the objection is something different from this, and applies to the external fact of the miracle rather than to its supernatural cause.

In this sense the objection is equivalent to an assertion, that no evidence can be strong enough to assure us that an event has taken place which, so far as our knowledge extends, cannot be reduced within the ordinary sequences of the natural world. The witness to it may possibly seem as clear, decisive, and untainted by any perceptible defect, as any evidence which we can imagine to be adduced in support of a fact; but whatever it may be, the assertion is that the probability of its being erroneous must always be greater than the probability that such an event really happened; in other words, that the attestation can under no circumstances be forcible enough to surmount the intrinsic unlikelihood of the attested event.

There are two forms in which this proposition has been maintained, and they require separate consideration. In the less obvious, the argument runs in this way. We can only know past events by the testimony of

persons who lived at the time and place of their occurrence. But unless the course of Nature is relied upon for being absolutely regular and uniform, we have no means of ascertaining that the attesting persons were really trustworthy and veracious. We can only argue back to them from what we know by experience about our own contemporaries. If, then, Nature is not uniform—if, on the contrary, its course is subject to miraculous changes and interruptions—we have no longer any assurance that the witnesses living in the past were really such beings as ourselves, possessed of like faculties, animated by the same kinds of motives, actuated by similar principles, and capable, therefore, of being estimated and judged by those criteria which we employ to test the credibility of witnesses in our own times. Whence it follows that in whatever degree miracles are supposed probable, in the same degree the validity of human testimony in the past

is impaired; and to assert the reality of a reported miracle because of the cogency of the attestation in its favour, becomes a suicidal process, inasmuch as the truth of the assertion would destroy the only grounds on which it can claim belief. The proof of the miracle by means of testimony is thus reduced to the level of the old logical dilemma, and compelled to revolve in an endless circle of self-contradiction. If so, the conclusion is inevitable, that testimony can in no case be sufficient to authenticate a past miraculous event.

The force of this argument obviously depends on the strange and gratuitous supposition, that a miracle implies such a loosening and breaking up of the order of Nature as would render it unsafe and precarious to draw from our own present experience any inferences about things of the past. No doubt the entire process of historical induction would become impracticable, if, in

addition to believing in miracles, we were compelled to think that in order to make room for them it would be necessary to abolish the law of causation in general, and to allow events to succeed each other universally without dependence or connection, like the scenes in some disordered and feverish dream. But if, as the Christian apologist maintains, miracles presuppose a general order of Nature to which they are exceptions, and are at the utmost of extremely rare occurrence, and lie within a very limited sphere of experience, and have for their purpose the confirmation of the moral order, not its abrogation,—the idea that they cannot happen without confounding the world so greatly as to disable our judgment and destroy the worth of testimony, is really too extravagant to deserve serious attention.

Such is the more recondite form of the argument for proving the incapacity of testimony to establish a miraculous event. We

have now to look at it in its simpler shape. Here the question is put as a balancing against each other of opposing probabilities. A miracle, it is said, is confessedly a breach of the uniformity of Nature. On one side, the general experience of mankind attests that uniformity to be constant and invariable; on the other, a few persons affirm that in a particular instance within their knowledge it has been broken. Which ought reasonably to carry most weight with it—the experience of the race at large, or the exceptional testimony of the insignificant minority? That testimony is very often untrustworthy, erroneous, and false, is a fact familiar to every one; and history shows that it is never less to be depended upon than when it concerns matters in which the witnesses feel a lively personal interest, and especially those which involve religious beliefs. But the uniformity of Nature, the unbroken continuity of its sequences, is a universal fact

upon which the entire edifice of practical life is built, and ever has been built, and in favour of which all the generations of mankind from the beginning bear consentient witness. Thus the conclusion is reached, that to every impartial mind it must appear immeasurably more likely that the testimony to any alleged miraculous event is untrustworthy, than that the uniform course of Nature was really interrupted to admit of such an exceptional event taking place.

In dealing with this argument as a polemical weapon forged for the purpose of attacking the credibility of the Christian miracles, I have two faults to find with it: it is defective in construction, and it lacks applicability.

It is defective in construction because it acquires its apparent plausibility from evoking before the mind the idea of a direct conflict of testimony with testimony; whereas the conflict really is between testimony on

one side, and an induction from testimony, a presumption created by testimony, on the other side. The case to which the reasoning is strictly applicable is that of a vast concourse of persons assembled at the same time, of whom a very few affirm the occurrence of a certain conspicuous incident *on that occasion*, while all the rest deny that it happened. Under such circumstances no one would question that the probabilities would be enormously against the reality of the incident. But in the case the argument pretends to deal with there is no such conflict of testimony at all. The majority attest the uniformity of Nature so far as their experience reaches; the minority do not impugn that experience, nor do they deny that in general Nature is uniform. All that these say is that on some particular occasion, when they were present, a momentary breach in the uniformity did take place in their sight. Here there is no conflict of word against word, no

contradiction of the affirmation of one by the counter-affirmation of the other. Both sets of witnesses may be right—the many in asserting the general experience, the few in testifying to a special experience of their own, in which the many had no share. Of course, the general experience creates a presumption against the miraculous—a presumption so great as to necessitate a most rigorous scrutiny of the evidence, before an alleged miracle can make good its claim on our belief. But an adverse presumption is not a contrary testimony, and cannot fairly be treated as such. It is certainly conceivable that peculiar circumstances might create a presumption in favour of some alleged miraculous event, so strong and impressive as to overbear and counteract the contrary presumption arising from the ordinary experience of mankind; and if that is conceivable, the *à priori* objection collapses.

But the argument, besides being unfairly

constructed, has also the fault of being inapplicable to the Christian miracles, and failing to touch the real case in their favour. What it deals with is some isolated prodigy, attested by a few persons who declare that they saw it occur. Nothing is taken into account but the naked fact itself, as it is described in the words of the witnesses. No train of events with which it may have been connected, no meaning which may possibly have inhered in it, no purpose which it may have served, no consequences which may have flowed from it, are allowed to be taken into consideration; no fragment, in a word, of the entire aggregate of circumstances which might create a probability that God was interposing for some important design, and, for the sake of it, interrupting for a moment the ordinary course of Nature. The miracle, stripped bare, gagged and bound, so to speak, is dragged before a hostile tribunal; no witnesses are permitted to testify, no pleas to be urged, on

its behalf; miracles have a bad name, and on that account alone it is summarily condemned.

Now this is a process which really has no bearing on the miracles that are vitally associated with Christianity. Of the case on their behalf, it is an absolutely essential part that they were instruments of God's moral government, signs of His Grace, methods of His revelation of Himself for the spiritual improvement of mankind; works—not preternatural, as if they were freaks of power, done in wanton violation of the order of the world—but above Nature, linked in with that long dispensation of gracious dealings with mankind which the Divine character renders antecedently probable, and a thousand evidences conspire to prove real. Against miracles thus lifted up into the region of God's moral government, and bound up with the revelation of His kingdom of grace, there can be no force in an argument which moves

towards its conclusion with such a careless insolence as to disdain to take any notice of God, or religion, or the spiritual nature of man. Such an argument might be sufficient to discredit the idle prodigies of Pagan legend or mediæval superstition, but against the mighty works and the resurrection of Jesus Christ it is ridiculously impotent.

CHAPTER III.

THE POINT OF VIEW FROM WHICH THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES SHOULD BE APPROACHED.

THE position reached in the foregoing discussion is this: That there is no such antecedent objection to the miracles of the Gospel as to render it superfluous and useless to proceed to the examination of the evidence, on the strength of which their reality is asserted. Nothing is known to us about the constitution of the physical universe on which we can base a conviction that miracles are intrinsically impossible. We have no reason to think that the character of God, as inferred from a consideration of the works of His hands, including man, lays upon His Will any necessity to refrain from special interpositions within the visible sphere, to carry out the

high purposes of His moral government. Human experience of the uniformity of the physical order goes no further than to attest its generality, which is a very different thing from its absolute universality. The miraculous, then, must be admitted to lie within the category of events, which, however rare, may possibly occur. The question whether it has ever occurred cannot be decided in the negative, any more than in the affirmative, by theoretical considerations, but must be solved by a patient sifting of evidence. And inasmuch as the miracles of Christianity claim to belong no less to the spiritual order than to that which is natural being signs of a Divine Kingdom established upon earth, or integral parts of a revelation of the Eternal Father to His human children, the evidence which justifies them must be sought in moral and spiritual considerations, as well as in testimony to them as historical facts.

The evidence, therefore, understood in this

wide sense, is what we are brought to at last. But in setting out to examine it in detail, it is of first-rate importance to approach it, not merely unbiassed by prejudice, but also from the point of view from which its force can be most fairly appreciated. It is this point of view that the present chapter will endeavour to establish.

The Christian miracles, it must always be borne in mind, in respect of their alleged purport and function, belong entirely to the sphere of religion. If they were not signs and instruments of Divine communication and dealing with mankind for the purposes of the higher life—the life of the spirit as contrasted with the physical and intellectual life—the question about their reality would sink into a mere speculation for the curious. What gives them their grand importance and commanding interest is the fact that they are bound up with the most momentous relations of man to the eternal God, his Creator and sovereign

Lord. Their truth means that God has manifested Himself to us in His Son Jesus Christ, and called us by Him into a Divine economy of grace, wherein incorruptible life shall be the inheritance of the faithful. On the other hand, their falsehood would mean that the revelation of the grace of God in Christ, on which Christendom is founded, is a baseless delusion, the offers and promises of the Gospel unauthorised inventions of men. Hence the whole practical interest of the miraculous element in Christianity centres in its religious bearing. And this, I contend, determines the proper method of approaching the evidences of its reality. It must be approached from the religious side; from the side of that system of faith and ethics which is inseparably associated with it—that Christianity which is, in every sense, the vastest and most wonderful phenomenon that has ever appeared in the religious development of our race.

This will, I hope, appear more clearly from

the following considerations. If we go back in thought to the age of the canonical Gospels, and realise to ourselves the scenes depicted in them, we cannot easily miss the significance which the miracles wrought by the hands of Christ had for the multitudes among whom He moved. What He preached was the setting up of a heavenly Kingdom upon earth. The far-off event which the Hebrew prophets had dimly foretold, that He declared to have now come. The Kingdom was the eternal Father's; and His office, as the Son of the Father, was to proclaim it, to illustrate it, and to call men into it. Thus preaching, He began to perform works in connection with His words—works of power, carrying with them the aspect and impression of the supernatural. Not prodigies unconnected with His message except as proofs of a Divine mission; but acts significant of the nature of the message, and of the character of the Kingdom announced in it—acts of healing, of bounty, of gracious

sympathy, pregnant with religious truth, and giving promise of ultimate triumph over the ills of human life, and even over death itself. The words and the acts went together, and jointly made up the revelation of the Father, and of the new spiritual Kingdom into which He was calling men by His Son.

Such is the sacred drama, so to speak, which the Gospels present to us, when we simply take them as the records which Christianity adopts as its historical basis. The immediate question is, What precise part did the miracles play in it? Undoubtedly they were the means in the first instance of fixing men's attention on the Doer of them, with an eager curiosity to learn who He was, and what were His office and message. Nothing else could have so forcibly struck their imaginations, stimulated their inquiries, and gained for His teaching a serious attention. But this office of the miracles was but a preliminary one. To

accept them as supernatural was by no means the same thing as to accept the Person who wrought them, and the Kingdom of which they were the signs. In fact, according to the records, their effect was curiously different upon different minds. Some who saw them were led on to real faith in Christ, and became His true disciples.[1] Others acknowledged in them the tokens of a prophet, but did not care to renounce their old habits, and to follow Him henceforth as their religious Master.[2] Others, again, were provoked by them to pursue the Doer of them with bitter hatred, to ascribe to Him complicity with Beelzebub, and finally to get rid of Him by treachery and violence.[3] To all of these alike the miracles were real, according to the testimony of the Gospels. What made the difference was the inward aspect

[1] John xvii. 6—8.
[2] John ii. 23; vi. 14; xiii. 37, 42.
[3] Matt. ix. 34. John xi. 47—53; xv. 24.

of the heart towards the doctrine which the miracles illustrated. Where the heart was sensitive to the voice of God, the teaching of Christ found it, laid hold of it, drew it on to true discipleship. Where the heart was careless and worldly, the doctrine took no lasting hold, and was neglected as soon as the superficial impression produced by the miracles wore out. Where the heart was thoroughly selfish and corrupt, the doctrine kindled its enmity, and stirred it up into vehement and unscrupulous antagonism. The real touchstone was the doctrine. The miracles attracted the attention of the people at large; but it was the teaching which won the hearts of the small portion who went on to become loyal disciples.

Such is the position assigned to the miracles of Jesus in the Christian documents. In laying stress upon it, I am not assuming the complete historical veracity of the documents, for that would be to beg the question at

issue. I am only pointing out the view which Christianity itself propounds respecting the miraculous element for which it claims belief; the light in which it regards the relation of the miracles to itself, and their proper function. They were never supposed to stand alone, as things to be discussed independently of any religious connection or spiritual purpose. They were never appealed to as mere proofs of a Divine mission, of which the logical force could be estimated by rigid scientific investigation alone. They were means to an end, integral parts of a revelation from above, signs of a Divine Kingdom, illustrations of a Gospel to which they led up, and only in connection with which their character and value could be rightly determined.

Now, if Christianity brings its miracles before us in this manner and this connection; if it sets them forth as inseparably bound up with a manifestation of the Divine purpose

and Will, which has profoundly affected the development of the human race, but as having no interest or value except in that association; then I feel entitled to urge that to sever them from that connection, and to judge them as if they stood alone, cannot be to treat them fairly. Alone, in their naked bareness, they might easily be pronounced highly improbable, and undeserving of credit. Knowing what we do, it might be said, of the ordinary course of the world, and the limits of human action, it is preposterous to ask us to believe that a man's voice ever stilled a tempest, healed a fever-stricken patient, restored vigour to a withered limb, or recalled the dead to life. And from that point of view the remonstrance would really be unanswerable. An alleged prodigy, destitute of meaning or connection, has no reasonable claim on our attention. Its truth or falsehood does not concern us practically. What was once said about the Jansenist

miracle of the holy thorn might be equally said of every such marvellous story, namely, that time must be at some discount with any man who should employ it in adjusting the balance of improbabilities in such a case as this. But let the connection of the miracles with Christianity at large be admitted, and their probability becomes inextricably intertwined with the probability that Christianity itself is supernatural. They cannot any longer be discussed by themselves, nor would it be of any use to endeavour so to discuss them. Whatever conclusion we might arrive at in that way would still have to be subordinated to our judgment of the greater question, whether Christianity, in all its power and breadth, is, or is not, of Divine origin. In other words, the problem of miracles is comprehended within, and overshadowed by, the problem of Christianity.

The point of view from which the miracles of the Gospels are approached is of such

primary importance to a just appreciation of the evidence in their favour, that I venture to dwell upon it a little longer, at the risk of seeming to go again over some of the ground which has been already trodden.

It cannot be denied that we stand towards the miracles in a position in many respects differentiated from that of the original eye-witnesses of them, and also from that of the persons to whom the testimony of the eye-witnesses was directly borne. The long space of time by which we are removed from their epoch cannot fail to affect the sureness of our intellectual processes, when we isolate those marvellous events from their moral and spiritual environment, and endeavour to judge them in their bareness as historical facts. If a pretended miracle were wrought in our own days and our own locality, our opportunities for forming a satisfactory judgment upon it would preponderate greatly over those which we possess for scrutinising reported miracles

of the past, as facts to be taken by themselves. Seeing is a much more vivid sense than hearing. Hearing from the actual witnesses brings us much nearer to the attested fact, than reading about it in ancient history can ever place us. The proximity of the event puts it within our power to ascertain the various circumstances associated with it; to bring it into connection with contemporary thoughts, knowledge, habits; to investigate the character of the witnesses, observe their bearing, and cross-examine them so as to subject their statements to a scrutiny more or less searching. Of these means of judicially testing the reality of an alleged miraculous event, so large a portion is necessarily taken from us by the lapse of the eighteen centuries which have rolled by since the Gospel miracles are said to have been wrought, that as mere historical incidents they are comparatively dim and indistinct to our mental sight, the actual testimony to them sounds faint and

far off, and to estimate them fairly and fully from the scientific point of view ceases to be practicable.

On the other hand, a new kind of evidence comes to our help, which was necessarily lacking to the original eye-witnesses and to their immediate auditors. We are surrounded by a mighty, living Christianity, to throw back light upon the records of its humble origin. The miracles that clustered round its birth were, according to the Christian belief, attestations of the Divine purpose in it, indications of the Divine presence vivifying and consecrating it. But a Christianity actually realised in history, standing before us with the unmistakable marks on its brow of supernatural energy, and filling the world with fruits which the natural stock of humanity could never by itself have borne—such a Christianity would be its own all-sufficing witness ; and just in proportion as its story, its character, and its achieved victories would

testify that God is in it now, in the same degree would they also testify that it began in God, and that supernatural power and grace presided over its infancy. So far, then, as our judgment is concerned, at this long distance of time, the miracles may be said to be less essential to the proof of Christianity than Christianity is to the justification of the miracles.

Again, the alternative to approaching the miraculous element of the Gospels from the side of the religion with which they are organically combined is to approach them from the side of Nature; and how futile that process would be may be easily perceived.

Looked at from the side of Nature, no doubt the Christian miracles, like all other reported miracles past and present, must appear extremely improbable. Our estimate of probability is necessarily derived from experience. If we ourselves, and others whose experience is known to us, have been accus-

tomed to see a certain event happen with unvaried regularity under given circumstances, we should in the future always expect it to happen whenever those circumstances were reproduced; and that it should not so happen would be esteemed by us as exceedingly unlikely. Again, if within the widest range of experience of which we have any information a certain kind of event had never been known to happen, the occurrence of such an event in the future would be invested in our minds with a very high degree of improbability. Suppose, then, we were to estimate by experience alone the chances that a miracle has happened or will happen, the result at which we should arrive could not be doubtful; for a miracle, by its definition, is an exceptional event, outside of and contrary to the observed order of things; an anomaly amidst the familiar phenomena of the visible world, a break in the sequences which we have always found constant and invariable. The

presumption, therefore, against it from the ground of experience, whether our own, or that of mankind in general, could not fail to be immensely strong.

Especially to trained students of physics would a miracle seem inadmissible and revolting, so long as they viewed it only from the point of view of their science. Their entire method of procedure, and the whole value of its results, depend on the assumption of the uniformity of Nature. No astronomer, no mechanician, no chemist, no prying observer of the secrets of any domain of the natural world, has within our knowledge ever lighted upon even a single supernatural interruption of the physical sequences under observation, or ever detected the intrusion of an incalculable agent external to Nature. Nothing could be more paralysing to their investigations than the apprehension of a failure of continuity in cosmical phenomena, or of the breaking in upon their experiments

unawares of some spiritual force to disturb the customary association between cause and effect. Science, in fact, *as such*, cannot admit the conception of miracles. Its object is to reduce all phenomena under known laws ; and if it cannot succeed at once, it works on in the unhesitating conviction that it will succeed at last. Nothing could seem to it more incongruous, less conceivable, than a supernatural phenomenon. The presumption against the occurrence of such a phenomenon is held by it to rest upon too universal an induction to be shaken by any individual testimony.

Yet, after all, how futile must every contention of this narrow and one-sided kind inevitably be to set aside the Christian miracles! However great may be the antecedent presumption against them, arising from observation of the unvaried order of Nature, it is nothing more than a presumption, which may possibly be overbalanced by an opposite presumption furnished by a different set of facts.

Presumptions are good only so long as they are unopposed. They have no logical validity or conclusiveness in the presence of positive arguments and countervailing evidence. When the sceptical student of physical science has disdainfully put aside the miraculous as undeserving of attention he still has Christianity to reckon with. Until he shall have succeeded in evacuating Christianity of everything in it which speaks to the devout heart of a supernatural power and grace, a glory and a beneficence which have their origin in Heaven, he will not have made one real step towards proving that the Christian miracles are unworthy of belief.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES.

IN the foregoing chapter it was urged that the miracles of the Gospel being, if real, essentially religious facts, deriving all their meaning and value from their organic relation to the revelation of God made to us in Christ, it is only from the religious side that they can be properly approached and fairly judged. To deal with them as independent events or simple prodigies, for the purpose of striking a balance between the intrinsic improbability which must cleave to them when so taken, and the force of the direct human testimony in their favour, would be a process incapable of leading to any valid conclusion, inasmuch as it would leave out of account the Chris-

tianity in which they inhere, and on which their justification must largely rest.

To the testimony, however, of the persons contemporary with them we must in any case come sooner or later, as a necessary element of the case. But here we are met by the incontestable fact that in weighing the value of testimony an influential personal bias is always operating with more or less of effect. What a person thinks of the strength of the various attestations, which combine to make up the grounds for some particular judgment, will, in a considerable measure, depend upon his own prepossessions and habits of mind. The same evidence will to one person appear strong, to another weak, not because they are not equally competent on the side of the intellect, but because they bring to the consideration of the evidence different conceptions of what is good or bad evidence, different views of human life, different estimates of probability, different conceptions of the case

submitted to them. In matters which strongly affect the feelings, and have a practical bearing on the conduct, no one's decision is determined by the formal evidence alone. Hope, fear, desire, habit, all play their part unconsciously in shaping it; and the general bent of the mind is so important a predisposing factor of the estimate arrived at, that from this alone in many cases the nature of the result may be confidently anticipated.

In the case of the Christian miracles, the estimate of the testimony for them will obviously be influenced to a very serious degree by the antecedent attitude of the mind towards the fundamental ideas of religion. It cannot possibly be otherwise. Were any one to approach the historical evidence for the wonderful works wrought by Christ, or for His resurrection, with the settled conviction that all religion is superstition, and that every man's practical business is simply to make the best of the physieal world

which environs him, the case for these supernatural events would in his mind be refuted before it was opened. Whatever might be pleaded, the answer would be ready: "The world has been full of superstitious beliefs, and this is one of them which dies hard. The circumstances may be curious, perhaps in some points even inexplicable, owing to our imperfect acquaintance with the past. But the vagaries of credulous minds are innumerable; and it would be a disloyalty to common sense to allow them in any case to disturb our experience of the settled order of things, and to gain our credence for such a chimera as the supernatural." Such would certainly be the answer; such it has been in the mouths of sceptics over and over again In their case the question of the credibility of the Christian miracles is decided, not by the evidence, but by the mental premiss which was brought to the examination of the evidence; and if only the premiss were a just

one, I do not know that there would be much to urge in reversal of the verdict.

But let the inquiry start from a premiss of an opposite tenor. Let a person bring to his examination of the same evidence a profound sense of his relation to a personal, living God. Such a sense will necessarily predominate over his other thoughts and feelings, and colour his entire conception of the world and of human life. In the physical sphere he will recognise the hand of this great Being continuously sustaining the order of Nature, and working out through it the purposes of His sovereign Will. In the moral sphere he will discern in the same Being the Head of a supreme government of righteousness, to which he is amenable both now and hereafter. Upon this Almighty Father and Lord his whole faculty of reverence will fasten; towards Him the strongest desires of his soul will go out; to know Him, and be in harmony with Him, will be counted by him

the supreme good. And just in proportion as he is conscious of imperfection, ignorance, and sin in himself, will he be likely to long for some nearer approach of the Eternal Father, some more definite manifestation of His Will, some voice from Him of guidance and comfort. In this frame of mind, let us suppose the evidence for the miracles of the Gospel to be submitted to his judgment, and is it not clear that they will wear to him a very different aspect from that which they wore to the self-satisfied and sensuous sceptic? He will have no temptation to recoil from the miraculous as from some unnatural and monstrous prodigy, since he believes that all physical pnenomena are effects of the Divine Will, and that these special effects, if only there is a moral reason for them, ought to be no more unaccountable or difficult of conception than those which are ordinary and familiar. And inasmuch as the alleged miracles purport to be the appropriate

signs and instruments of a revelation of the very kind that he longs for, and which he feels to be not only needful for man to receive, but suitable for God to make, they will so fall in with the bent of his most serious thoughts as to secure for the evidence on which they rest a fair and favourable hearing.

I repeat, then, that the effect upon an inquirer's mind produced by the direct evidence for the Christian miracles will be greatly dependent on the antecedent presumption, for or against their probability, which he brings to the consideration of it. That this presumption should be the right one cannot, therefore, but be of immense importance to the correct solution of the problem which they present.

Now, the doctrine of Theism, which I have employed to illustrate the operation of a predisposing influence in affecting our estimates of the force and value of evidence, is

precisely that doctrine which the Christian miracles confessedly assume as the primary basis of their credibility. The argument for them starts from it, and cannot make a single step in its absence. So long as it is denied, or refused admission as a premiss, so long to debate the question of miracles is futile. If, then, we would take the entire argument from the beginning, setting out with the antecedent presumption, and advancing from that to the positive evidence, it is with the doctrine of Theism that a commencement must be made.

For what reasons do we believe in a living, personal God?—a God who not only made us and all the world, and is the ground of all finite being, but is, moreover, a God who cares for us, and rules us in justice and love—a heavenly Father, to whom we may look up with combined reverence and trust? For what reasons? Let me indicate them in the briefest possible manner. Because, existing

in the depths of our nature, and asserting itself irresistibly in our best moments, we are conscious of a religious instinct which reaches out towards God; yearns to know, to worship, and to trust Him, and refuses to be satisfied without Him. Again, because we recognise our subjection to a law of duty, authoritatively impressed on our moral nature, which witnesses to us of a holy and righteous Lawgiver, to whom we are responsible for our conduct and thoughts. Once more, because we are unable to conceive of any source of our own personality and will, except One who Himself possesses personality and will; any source of the moral affections which are the glory of human nature in its noblest development, except One in whom those affections inhere in a transcendent degree; or any source of the order, the beauty, the exquisite mechanism and organisation of the physical world, except One who is infinite in power, intelligence, and wisdom.

Such is the Theism which the miracles of the Gospel presuppose; such the manner in which it justifies itself to our reason, and has justified itself to the reason of the thoughtful and devout ever since the human race began to reflect seriously upon religion. How it opens the way for expecting and recognising a supernatural intercourse of God with mankind we have already seen. Being what we know ourselves to be, weak, ignorant, needing Divine teaching and succour; and God being what we believe Him to be on the grounds just indicated, wise, compassionate, and gracious; it could not be a matter of surprise to us that He should reveal Himself to us by some more potent instrumentality than the ordinary course of Nature. If, then, under these circumstances, there were to come within the sphere of our experience what purported to be communications from Him revealing truths of supreme importance for our highest interests, and accompanied by significant phe-

nomena such as seemed not obscurely to indicate His interposition in a method above Nature, it could not be reasonable for us to say that the communications were too needless and superfluous, or the instrumentality they employed too improbable, to deserve any serious consideration at our hands. On the contrary, our antecedent belief in God, combined with our acquaintance with ourselves and our deepest needs, would create a considerable presumption in their favour, and justly incline us to examine them as things which had no insurmountable improbability to discredit them.

This, however, is only part of the counter-presumption by which the prejudice against the miraculous, engendered by general experience, may, in the case of the Christian miracles, be overcome. Besides the doctrine of Theism, which roots itself in our intellectual and moral faculties as the only satisfactory explanation of ourselves and of

the universe, we have also inherited a positive system of religious doctrine and ethics, which, under the name of Christianity, has been for eighteen centuries moulding the world's civilisation, and has won to itself the adherence of all the foremost, the imperial races of mankind. This system professes to be founded on a supernatural manifestation of God, and to derive its energy from the unseen, the spiritual world. Amidst all its historical variations and developments it has everywhere and always preserved these characteristics—that a supernatural Christ is its centre, and faith in Him its sustaining principle. Comparing what it has done with what other religions have effected, its achievement stands out unmistakably as being without parallel in the annals of mankind. It has been to the world like life from the dead. However greatly obstructed in countless ways by human weakness and perversity, it has penetrated social life with a renovating in-

fluence in all the provinces of thought and conduct. It has taught magnanimity and compassion to the strong; to the feeble, patience and hope. It has purified and elevated human relationships, refined the passions, associated men together in sacred brotherhood, taught them the excellence of self-sacrifice for each other's good, woven a crown of honour for the weaker sex, stamped the brand of shame on cruelty, lust, and deceit. Out of its bosom have sprung saints, philanthropists, heroic martyrs and confessors, in whom virtue has reached its supreme earthly perfection; and countless have been its adherents whose lives it has purified and cheered, whose deaths it has irradiated with immortal hope. Nor has it yet shown the least sign of waning or wearing out. Never before has it been so strong in its vitality, so far-reaching in its aims, as in the present generation; never gone forth with so sustained, so mighty, an impulse to

draw the still alien nations and tribes within its beneficent embrace.

Taking account of the whole case thus briefly sketched, what can be said less than this?—That if ever there has been a religion based on a revelation from God, Christianity is that religion; that if ever in a human envoy the Eternal Father has manifested Himself, Christ is that envoy. Rivalry and comparison are out of the question. The only alternatives are—Christianity, or no supernatural religion at all; Christ, or no messenger at all from the God of heaven and earth. That is the very least that can be said. But I dare to say more, because the facts say more. I would ask the hesitating or sceptical critic of Christianity to contemplate it as a whole with an unprejudiced mind. Let him begin with tracing down its story from the moment of its humble birth. Let him note its marvellous advance in spite of all impediments; its victories over the ancient idolatries and philo-

sophies; its conquest of the intellect and the heart of the nations out of which Christendom has been formed. Then let him examine its substance; let him observe its harmony with the conscience, its suitability to human needs, the illumination thrown by it over the perplexing mysteries of existence, the power of the motives by which it stimulates virtue, the magnificence of the eternal hopes which it unfolds. Still more, let him follow it into the more private sphere of its working, and see it cleansing the sinful, sustaining the weak, consoling the sorrow-stricken, kindling the heroisms of unselfishness and of duty, fostering graces of unearthly sweetness, cementing the bonds of human fellowship by drawing them within the sanctions of the Divine love. Let the sceptic or waverer behold Christianity being and doing all this, and then let him lay his hand on his heart and confess which supposition seems to him the more probable: that this transcendent phenomenon, this

mighty world-regenerating religion, is a mere human invention; or that it shines with a lustre of celestial origin, and that on the brow of the Christ in whom it centres gleams a crown of supernatural dignity?

But if the latter conclusion is the one which on the whole approves itself to a mind capable of appreciating moral and spiritual forces, let it be remembered that the entire balance of the probability for it goes to augment the presumption in favour of the miracles of the Gospel. That vaguer predisposition to accept them which Theism created is now enlarged and crystallised into a definite expectation by our experience of Christianity. For we can trace back this religion to that Jesus whose story the canonical Gospels profess to relate. We know that it rests upon His Person, His teaching, His office and work. To Him Christianity points, in Him it centres: of Him, we may almost say, it consists. If it be supernatural, so must He be. And if He be a

supernatural Person, His story places us at once in the region of the miraculous. In the scenes which that story presents, the veil which hides the spiritual order is actually drawn aside. God is interposing to make Himself known by a method which forms no part of the natural order, but is outside and above it. Entering those scenes in thought, then, we are in contact with a Divine manifestation of an exceptional kind; and should exceptional acts of power and grace appear to accompany it, there would be no reason to deem them incredible, or strange, or other than appropriate tokens of Him who came forth from God, and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth.

CHAPTER V.

THE DIRECT EVIDENCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES.

WE are at last ready to examine, and estimate the force of, the testimony by which the miracles of the Gospel are commended to our belief. If the foregoing argument is sound, the antecedent prejudice raised by experience against the miraculous in general has in their case been rebutted, and ought to be replaced by a feeling that these particular miracles are sufficiently probable to be believed on such testimony as in other serious matters would carry conviction with it. Of course our limits will not permit of more than a very compressed summary of the direct evidence.

Were the four canonical Gospels the earliest

of the Christian documents, and confessedly written by the authors to whom they are commonly attributed, the primary appeal would necessarily lie to them. For in that case we should possess in them the testimony at first hand of at least two eye-witnesses, and of two other writers who had conversed intimately with many who had been eye-witnesses. But the partial obscurity which is alleged by critics of the modern sceptical school to envelop the date and authorship of these records renders it expedient to turn in the first instance to documents over which no manner of doubt hangs. These are to be found among the Epistles which bear the name of St. Paul.

Within the interval between A.D. 52 and 62 —that is, in the decade separated from the Crucifixion by about twenty-two years—fall those of these Epistles, seven in number, which are of primary importance to the argument. Regarding the authenticity of four of

these (Galatians, I. and II. Corinthians, and Romans), the acutest hostile criticism has been unable to suggest any doubt worth noticing; and the attempts to impugn the remainder (I. and II. Thessalonians, and Philippians) have been so feeble as practically to have ended in complete failure. In short, the whole seven, whatever may be thought of the other Epistles ascribed to St. Paul, must be received as genuine by every unprejudiced and competent judge of ancient literature; and may safely be taken as bearing unimpeachable witness to the writer's own personal story, and to the contemporary state of the religion of which he was the foremost Apostle. In regard to himself, his character is to be read unmistakably in them; his powerful intellect, his passionate sincerity, his magnificent unselfishness, his burning love for his fellow-men, stand out in the vividest colours. As to his career, we learn that after reaching manhood as a zealous and trusted

antagonist of the Christianity which had lately sprung into being, he was won over to it by irresistible evidence of its truth, and henceforth counted all things loss that he might proclaim and extend it.[1] As to the contemporary condition of the infant religion, the letters show, partly by their addresses, and still more by casual notices contained in them, that there already existed, scattered about in the Roman Empire, a very large number of religious communities based upon and held together by the belief that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified in Jerusalem, was in very truth a supernatural Person, the Son of the most High God, who came from heaven to manifest the Father, and, after being slain, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and from thence continued to sustain and guide those who became His disciples.[2] This belief,

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 22—28. Gal. i. 13—24. Phil. iii. 4—7.

[2] Rom. x. 18; xv. 18, 19; xvi. 26. 1 Cor. xv. 1—11. 1 Thess. i. 7, 8.

we further learn, was not one which might be easily professed and involved no sacrifices; it severed those who entertained it from the mass of their relatives and neighbours, exposed them to calumny, spoliation, and violence, and could only be maintained by persons who were ready to part with their lives sooner than give it up.[1]

Indirectly, these letters establish much more than this. They carry back our knowledge to an earlier period, and throw an illuminating gleam over the very birth of Christianity. The communities which they show us holding the faith of Christ, long before the generation which witnessed His crucifixion had passed away, came of course into existence still nearer to that event, some of them dating their commencement not more than ten years after it. St. Paul himself, the founder of them, must at a still earlier date have been brought face to face

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 8—11. 1 Thess. ii. 14. 2 Thess. i. 4, 5.

with a living, vigorous Christianity, to the power of which he yielded; and that Christianity must have had an earlier beginning still. We can thus infer from these letters that between the passing away of Jesus, and the successful proclamation of Him as the risen and glorified Saviour, there was no appreciable interval. We are assured, besides, that St. Paul, when within a few years of the first preaching of Christianity he felt himself constrained to embrace it, was no stranger to the events out of which it had grown. If not resident in Judæa during the short public career of Jesus, he had certainly lived there in the years immediately preceding, receiving the highest education which Judaism could furnish;[1] and, on his return, when he threw himself into the attempt to crush the rising religion, all the circumstances were still quite recent, and were the subject of lively debate. He tells us himself that he

[1] Gal. i. 13, 14.

knew of hundreds of persons who declared that with their own eyes they had seen Jesus alive after His death and burial.[1] Hence it is certain that, while still a fierce opponent of Christianity, St. Paul was perfectly familiar with its professedly supernatural basis, and with the sort of testimony on which it rested. If, then, his conversion is singularly impressive because it was effected in the face of his antecedent training and strongest prepossessions, it is scarcely less so because of his ample opportunities for knowing accurately the whole train of events of which Christianity was the immediate consequence.

These letters of St. Paul are irrefragable evidence that, beginning from the days of Jesus, there existed and spread during the next thirty years, notwithstanding every kind of opposition and hindrance, an active faith that He was a supernatural Person, who came into the world to manifest the Eternal

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 6.

Father, and after being put to death, rose again, and went back into heaven, to become the unseen Lord and Helper of all who call upon His name. From that point common history takes up the tale. This faith went on, conquering the hearts of men. Those who accepted it proclaimed it, lived by it, died for it, if need were. And they succeeded in winning for it an ever-widening acceptance. Not by force, not by bribes, not by flattering vanity, or offering luxurious ease. By very different weapons they prevailed. By pureness, by long-suffering, by kindness, by love unfeigned;[1] by witnessing to a truth which found an echo in the weary heart and awakening conscience; by exhibiting a sympathy which like some celestial balm soothed the festering wounds of the soul; by living lives which put to shame the impure and selfish life of heathenism. By such means the religion of the Cross spread;

[1] 2 Cor. vi. 6.

by such testimony the disciples of Jesus gained victories for their Master's cause. Weak means indeed of triumphing over the armed might of the world! inexplicable the success, unless truth was on the side of the witnesses! But the success was as conspicuous and amazing as the authors of it were feeble. Calumniated, plundered, tortured, slain outright, they often were; now the heavy hand of the Roman Government smote them down, now the fury of the populace broke on their devoted heads. But the new faith went on unchecked. From the lower ranks it invaded the higher; it took possession of the schools of learning; it emptied the pagan temples, and swept away their unclean orgies; it established itself upon the imperial throne; it conquered to itself, one after another, the vigorous races which came down from the North, and out of them built up the Christendom in the midst of which it is our high privilege to dwell.

Such is the story which may be drawn from the unquestioned Epistles of St. Paul, supplemented as to later events by equally unquestioned historical documents. What impression ought it to leave on our minds? Can we dare to say that its basis was a mere delusion? That Jesus could not have been a supernatural Person, and could not have risen from the dead, just because we are pleased to think the supernatural and miraculous inadmissible? The hundreds of persons who knew Jesus personally, and went forth at the risk of their lives to testify of His resurrection —are we contented lightly to set them all aside as impostors or deluded fanatics? Do we in our inmost consciences feel entitled to pronounce the event which transformed the world a fable, the doctrine which regenerated society a falsehood? Nothing less than this is the issue. If we knew of no reason for believing in a God who cares for His earthly children, and rules over them with gracious

wisdom, we might possibly, indeed, look on the phenomena with a stupid, unintelligent wonder, and see no means of interpreting them. But, bringing into connection with them the thought of a heavenly Father whom we need to know more fully than Nature has revealed or can reveal Him, what explanation can we find more probable, more obvious, than this, that God has really spoken unto us by His Son, Jesus the Christ?

We turn now to the four canonical Gospels. If, as is certain, Christianity sprang up with the vigour of a living, self-propagating faith as soon as Jesus disappeared, the intense interest attaching to His person would naturally find its expression in records of His earthly life composed by writers to whom the circumstances were familiar. The Gospels profess to be four such records. According to generally received tradition two of them were written by persons who had been intimate

companions of Jesus; the other two by persons living in close intercourse with many who had enjoyed that advantage. For the value of that tradition the least that can be said is, that it is a great deal stronger than the traditions for the authorship of most of the classical works which have come down to us from ancient times. At any rate, there can be no doubt that, be the precise date and authorship of the Gospels what it may, early in the second century—that is, considerably less than a hundred years after the death of Jesus—they were already current in the Christian communities as sacred books, and were accepted and appealed to as authentic records of the life and doctrine of the great Master. When we open the documents something more than this appears. They were certainly not the earliest memoirs of Jesus which had appeared, nor were their contents a novelty which was then for the first time made known. One of the authors

expressly says that many compilers of a biography of Jesus had preceded him;[1] and when we compare with each other the three Gospels which go by the name of the Synoptics—those of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke—we cannot miss seeing that they imply a pre-existing and well-known narrative of the chief events of His life. The large section common in substance to them all, yet curiously varied in minute particulars and phrases, necessarily points to a document or tradition of prior date, and can scarcely be doubted to represent the cycle of instruction which had long been taught in the scattered churches. Thus these three Gospels, even though we could not rely on the tradition about their authors, must be taken to present the main outlines of the story of Jesus as it was generally received by the Christian communities, sufficiently soon after His death to admit of its being verified by many who had

[1] Luke i. 1.

actually been "eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word."[1]

So much for the practical nearness of these documents to the events which they undertake to describe. Now let us look at their intrinsic character. No competent judge has ever read, or can ever read, them without being struck with the conspicuous sincerity, the transparent simplicity, the self-evidencing veracity and good faith of their authors. There is nothing like them in all the literature of the world. That the writers of them believed what they narrated, it is really impossible, except under the influence of inveterate prejudice, to doubt. The events which they relate are indeed stupendous, but their manner of relating them is free from any marks of conscious embellishment, of straining after effect, of desire to excite astonishment, of artificial posing or fraudulent purpose. Honesty breathes from every page and line.

[1] Luke i. 2.

But that is far from being all that characterises their tone and manner. They are clearly steeped in the most intense and unfeigned reverence for goodness. They perceive the matchless moral beauty of the character and teaching of Jesus, and with the whole force of their unsophisticated natures they throw themselves on its side. That alone gives to their testimony more than the weight of honesty; it adds the weight of superior insight. That they should have been able, at so early a period, to discern in the doctrine of Jesus that transcendent force which the history of Christendom has since verified in it, renders it utterly improbable that they were weak-minded enthusiasts, open to hallucinations, or carried away by marvellous stories which had no foundation in facts. Nor is that all. The portraiture of Jesus drawn by their pens is unique. It is itself a miracle. That it should have originated in the brains of Galilæan peasants is utterly incredible. Its

perfect balance, its moral grandeur, its exquisite tenderness and compassion, put to shame the most successful efforts of the most highly-cultured human genius. It is Divinity itself in its fairest, sweetest, loveliest form. The conscience, the affections, alike bow down before it, as before the manifestation of the Supreme God, the Father of lights, the ever-blessed and all-perfect One.

Such are the four Gospels which profess to give us the facts on which the Christianity preached by St. Paul rested. How closely they hang together with the subsequent history is evident. Like it, they attest the supernatural Personality of Jesus, the nature of His doctrine, and the facts of His resurrection and ascension into Heaven. What they add is the record of His miraculous actions. Of this it is enough to say here that it lies in every one of the Gospels, and most emphatically in the Fourth, not like some foreign element or supplemental afterthought,

but as ingrained in their substance—as an integral and almost necessary part of their portraiture; that as a whole it is supported by the same direct testimony as the other parts; and that if the resurrection be admitted as being the only conceivable starting-point for the promulgation of Christianity, the preceding miracles need no separate or additional justification. That such a Being as the Jesus whom St. Paul preached should have walked among men, without scattering around Him supernatural signs of His glory and grace, would have been even more astonishing than that He should have done the works which are ascribed to Him in the Gospels.

The evidence, however, does not end here. If the Gospels record the primary facts of Christianity, and St. Paul's letters give us an insight into their early results, we have, besides, in the Acts of the Apostles, a detailed account of the first start of the new faith,

followed by a compressed sketch of St. Paul's labours to extend it. If this document be genuine history, it completes a chain of evidence which may fairly claim to be infrangible. And to prove that it is genuine history, and not a fanciful romance, there is an unusual amount of evidence. After all sceptical attempts to shake its authenticity, it still holds its ground as being the work of a trusted companion of St. Paul, the same person as the author of the third Gospel. If so, it is a contemporary document, from the pen of a writer of first-rate competence, himself a witness and an actor in a large part of the scenes which he describes. It is marked by the same features of veracity and goodness which characterise the Gospels; and when we compare it with the letters of St. Paul which run parallel to it, but in entire independence, we discover between them and it such undesigned coincidences and mutual corroborations as nothing but truth could

have produced. Now, what does it tell us? Just this: that within a few weeks of the Crucifixion, in the very city where that tragedy had taken place in the sight of all men, Jesus of Nazareth was boldly proclaimed as a supernatural Person, who had risen from the dead and gone up into heaven to become a Prince and a Saviour;[1] that in spite of every attempt to crush it, this new faith gained thousands of adherents upon the spot,[2] rapidly spread throughout Syria, from Joppa to Antioch, and before thirty years had passed established itself in the chief cities of Asia Minor and Eastern Europe; thus justifying St. Paul's boast that although a crucified Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness, yet to those who were called, both Jews and Greeks, He was the power of God and the wisdom of God.[3]

[1] Acts ii. 32, 36; v. 30, 31.
[2] Acts iv. 4; v. 14; vi. 7.
[3] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

Having thus very cursorily reviewed the direct evidence for the Christian miracles, let me ask the reader to put together the several parts of the case on their behalf. *First.* The antecedent probability, growing out of Theism, that the gracious Father in heaven would give to His children a clearer knowledge of Himself, and of the way to be at peace with Him, than it is possible for Nature to furnish. *Secondly.* The probability, at least equally strong, that Christianity, an absolutely unique phenomenon in the world for grandeur, power, and beneficence, actually embodies that much-needed knowledge. And, *thirdly*, the abundant historical evidence that the Jesus in whom Christianity took its rise, and who is Himself the very substance of it, lived among men a life above Nature; and after being slain, rose from the dead, and was seen by many who had familiarly known Him, and who forthwith boldly proclaimed His resurrection at the peril of their lives, and won the

world over to believe in it. Putting together these several parts of the case, and fairly weighing it as a whole before the tribunal of the conscience and spirit, let the reader judge whether to candid, God-fearing hearts the miraculous element in Christianity be not sufficiently justified.

CHAPTER VI.

OTHER BIBLICAL MIRACLES.—CONCLUSION.

IT cannot have escaped the reader's notice that the preceding discussion has dealt exclusively with the miraculous element inhering in the alleged supernatural revelation of God, made to mankind in the Person and doctrine of Jesus Christ. The reason for this limitation of the argument is to be found in the fact, that the true battle-field against the naturalism of modern scepticism is the fourfold Gospel history, and that the issue of the conflict on behalf of the Biblical miracles in general must be decided there, and there alone. If won there, it is won in principle and substance both for the Old Testament miracles, and also for those which are affirmed or im-

plied[1] in the subsequent parts of the New Testament. But if lost there, it could not be saved elsewhere; the entire miraculous element of the Bible would in that case perish with the perishing of that portion of it which pervades the four canonical Gospels.

How true this is, even of the miracles recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, will be perceived by reflecting on the position in which these would be left if the Gospel narrative were discarded as mythical, and its affirmation of a supernatural Christ were rejected. In that case their basis would be swept away from beneath them; they would be left in the air, unsupported and destitute of meaning. The strength of their appeal to our belief lies in the preconception of a risen, glorified Christ, whose mighty presence was dwelling unseen with His chosen witnesses, and giving effect to their testimony for Him. In His name and through His energy were the

[1] Acts v. 12. Rom. xv. 18, 19. 2 Cor. xii. 12. Heb. ii. 4.

miracles confessedly performed, as signs of His redeeming power and grace ;[1] take Him away, and they would sink back into the category of things anomalous and incredible. Severed from their basis and support in Him, it would not be possible for them any longer to resist disintegration by a critical solvent, under the decomposing action of which the miracles of the Gospel had already gone to pieces and vanished away.

Still more must this incapacity to stand alone hold good with regard to the miracles of the Old Testament. Taken by themselves, and viewed only from a historical point of view, as recorded facts to be submitted to critical investigation of their reality, it would be impracticable to make out a case for them which should at all nearly approach in strength the case that can be constructed on behalf of the miraculous element in Christianity. They are too remote, too casual, so

[1] Acts iii. 6, 16 ; iv. 9, 10 ; ix. 34.

to speak, too slightly inwrought into the story of the world's development, to allow the effort to save them to be successful, if the cause of the miraculous were already lost on the battle-field of the Gospel record. It is only when we have made good the faith of a supernatural Christ, walking among men in the glory of a Divine power and grace, that we are able with full assurance to trace the hand of God moulding the ages of preparation for His coming, and to discern in the long vista of Hebrew development that supernatural Presence which is the background of miracles, and gives them credibility and meaning.

Taking, however, the miraculous element of the Bible as a connected whole, it is possible to detect in it a tolerably clear intimation of a law by which its phenomena are explained and justified. That law may be expressed by saying that miracles emerge at critical moments only—at epochs of new religious development, when some fresh start

is made which seems to require, and to be worthy of, a supernatural intervention of God within the visible sphere. The miraculous is not scattered promiscuously across the pages of the Bible. It groups itself mainly around three conspicuous centres. The first is the national birth of Israel, the Messianic nation, the throes of which are illustrated by the outburst of wonders accompanying the exodus from Egypt, the passage through the desert, and the conquest of Canaan. The second is the rise of the great prophetic witness to the Divine Kingdom, and to the hopes of the world bound up with it, beginning with the days of Elijah, who was the type of the Lord's immediate Forerunner. The third is the manifestation, in the fulness of time, of the Divine Son of man, the anointed Saviour and Lord, to whom the preceding ages had been ever pointing forwards as they rolled along in their troubled course. These are the three

paramount epochs of Biblical miracles; and it need scarcely be remarked, that if in the Divine education of mankind, and the evolution of God's redeeming purpose, there have ever been appropriate seasons for special exhibitions of the presence and operation of Him who holds the world's fortunes in His hand, such seasons above all others were these.

It is true that in other parts of the long story of Israel's growth and office the miraculous, or apparently miraculous, every now and then breaks in upon the narrative, and disturbs its natural course. To shield such cases from sober and reverent criticism is no part of the Christian apologist's duty. He is free to confess that in each there is fair room for investigating the exact significance of the narrative, weighing the cogency of the historical evidence in its favour, and forming an estimate of the religious justification that can be pleaded for the marvel which it

records. In the interpretation of such primitive records of the Divine dealings with our fathers, the sources of which are for the most part obscure or doubtful, there must always be considerable room for hesitancy and diversity of judgment. But there is one thing on which he is bound to insist, as being of primary importance; and that is, the point of view from which all such critical inquiries ought to start. Let the principle of God's miraculous intervention, on fitting occasions, for the purposes of His moral government, be admitted, on the ground of the evidence for the miracles of the Gospel, and all the rest becomes a matter of detail. Whether by ordinary providences, or by extraordinary interpositions, we shall still be sure that God was always guiding the world's slow and turbulent development, so as to prepare the way of His Son, and the antecedent historical basis on which Christianity was afterwards built up will be amply secured.

The remark may be added, that the law which assigns miracles to seasons of great development in the economy of grace, goes far to explain why, since the establishment of Christianity, they have, as we believe, ceased to be wrought. The final character of the Gospel, as a Divine revelation, leaves no occasion for new messages from heaven. The abiding presence of the Spirit of truth is sufficient to guide the Church and convince the world. Other evidences, more potent and penetrating than any marvels of superhuman power, are granted to us in the story of Christianity, the cleansing of sinful souls, and the beautiful fruits borne by the faith in saintly lives. Should it, indeed, be in the Divine purpose that before the end comes some terrible antichristian power shall trample down the Church beneath the iron heel of persecution, and, like the wild beast of the Apocalyptic visions, muster the forces of earth and hell to crush it out of existence,

such a season of man's extremity might perchance be again God's opportunity for making bare His arm, and coming forth in visible action to avenge His own elect. But until such a crisis shall arrive, if it ever shall, we can scarcely be wrong in thinking that miracles are not to be expected, and would be out of place amidst the ordinary ministries of grace, and the regular growth of the Divine Kingdom upon earth.

In concluding this imperfect endeavour to defend the miraculous element of Christianity against modern sceptical assaults, I would entreat the reader who is honestly seeking for light and truth to bear in mind that the question under discussion is no trifling or curious one, but one which reaches down into the very roots of our spiritual nature, and vitally concerns the relation of our world to the eternal God. The evidence for the mighty works of Christ, and for the crowning miracle of His resurrection, is too strong to be

rebutted, except by the previous assumption that the course of the world is a purely mechanical one, and that no living God actively energises in it. To maintain a distinction, in regard to the Divine presence and action, between the spiritual sphere and the physical is impracticable. There is no logical ground on which such a distinction can rest; nor would it be possible to draw a defining line, so inseparably are the two spheres intertwined and mutually related in human life and action. If God be denied such freedom of rule in the visible system, as would enable Him to make it the instrument of His moral government, the denial must logically be extended to His relation to us as the Father of our spirits, in the knowledge of Whom stands our eternal life. He cannot be half a God: the God of heaven, but not of earth; the God of the soul, but not of the body; the God of the conscience, but not of Nature, Society, and Civilisation. He must be all, or prac-

tically nothing; a living God and Father, who is with us in every one of our relations, whether of body or soul, to earth or to heaven; or else a mere impersonal Force, outside us, and incapable of drawing to itself any reverence, trust, or hope.

It is one of the offices of the miraculous works wrought by Christ to help us to realise the living presence of our heavenly Father in the natural system which encompasses us. Regarded as real acts of the Son of God, performed in the power of His supernatural personality, that they might be signs and tokens of the Divine Kingdom into which He has called us, they interpret the nature and principles of that Kingdom, and put into a striking visible shape the laws of its administration. They show us how closely earth and heaven are welded together in the great rule of the Divine Grace, and how things material and temporal are subordinated to those which are

spiritual and everlasting. To us, as children of the Kingdom, they testify that there is but one comprehensive, all-pervading Order under which we live; an Order gathering up the whole of our interests and concerns under the care of a righteous and merciful Will; never leaving us to be the sport of blind physical forces, the helpless victims of fate or chance; but compelling the whole of our environment to minister to the well-being of our complex nature, body, soul, and spirit, that we may finally be presented perfect before the eternal Throne.

Printed by CASSELL & COMPANY, Limited, La Belle Sauvage, London, E.C.

Helps to Belief.

A Series of Helpful Manuals on the Religious Difficulties of the Day.

EDITED BY THE

Rev. T. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE, M.A.,

Chaplain in Ordinary to the Queen.

PRICE ONE SHILLING EACH.

CREATION.
By the LORD BISHOP OF CARLISLE.

THE DIVINITY OF OUR LORD.
By the LORD BISHOP OF DERRY.

PRAYER.
By the Rev. T. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE, M A.

MIRACLES.
By the Rev. BROWNLOW MAITLAND, M.A.

THE RESURRECTION.
By the LORD ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.

THE ATONEMENT.
By the LORD BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH.

GOD.
By the Rev. PROF. MOMERIE, M.A.

THE MORALITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.
By the Rev. NEWMAN SMYTH, D.D.

Cassell & Company, Limited, London; Paris, New York & Melbourne.

H.B. 6.86.

"HEART CHORDS."

A Series of Works by Eminent Divines. Bound in cloth, red edges.

ONE SHILLING EACH.

MY FATHER.
By the Right Rev. ASHTON OXENDEN, late Bishop of Montreal.

MY BIBLE.
By the Right Rev. W. BOYD CARPENTER, Bishop of Ripon.

MY WORK FOR GOD.
By the Right Rev. BISHOP COTTERILL.

MY OBJECT IN LIFE.
By the Ven. ARCHDEACON FARRAR, D.D.

MY ASPIRATIONS.
By the Rev. GEORGE MATHESON, D.D.

MY EMOTIONAL LIFE.
By the Rev. PREB. CHADWICK, D.D.

MY BODY.
By the Rev. PROF. W. G. BLAIKIE, D.D.

MY SOUL.
By the Rev. P. B. POWER, M.A.

MY GROWTH IN DIVINE LIFE.
By the Rev. PREBENDARY REYNOLDS, M.A.

MY HEREAFTER.
By the Very Rev. DEAN BICKERSTETH.

MY WALK WITH GOD.
By the Very Rev. DEAN MONTGOMERY.

MY AIDS TO THE DIVINE LIFE.
By the Very Rev. DEAN BOYLE.

MY SOURCES OF STRENGTH.
By the Rev. E. E. JENKINS, M.A., Secretary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society.

THE EARLY DAYS OF CHRISTIANITY.

By the Ven. ARCHDEACON FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S.

LIBRARY EDITION. (*Ninth Thousand.*) Two Vols., demy 8vo. cloth, 24s.; or morocco, £2 2s.
POPULAR EDITION, cloth, 6s.; cloth gilt, 7s. 6d.; Persian morocco, 10s. 6d.; tree-calf, 15s.

THE LIFE AND WORK OF ST. PAUL.

By the Ven. ARCHDEACON FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S.

LIBRARY EDITION. (*Twentieth Thousand.*) Two Vols., demy 8vo, cloth, 24s.; or bound in morocco, £2 2s.
ILLUSTRATED EDITION. With about 300 Illustrations, £1 1s.; or bound in morocco, £2 2s.
POPULAR EDITION, cloth, 6s.; cloth gilt, 7s. 6d.; Persian morocco, 10s. 6d.; tree-calf, 15s.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

By the Ven. ARCHDEACON FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S.

LIBRARY EDITION. (*Thirty-first Edition.*) Two Vols., demy 8vo, cloth, 24s.; or morocco, £2 2s.
ILLUSTRATED EDITION. With about 300 Original Illustrations. 4to, cloth, gilt edges, 21s.; calf or morocco, £2 2s.
BIJOU EDITION. Five Vols., cloth, in box, 10s. 6d. the set; or French morocco, 21s.
POPULAR EDITION, in One Vol., cloth, 6s.; cloth, gilt edges, 7s. 6d.; Persian morocco, 10s. 6d.; tree-calf, 15s.

THE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARY FOR ENGLISH READERS.

Edited by the Right Rev. C. J. ELLICOTT, D.D., Lord Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol.

Five Volumes, 21s. each; or in half morocco, £7 17s. 6d. the set.
Volume I., price 21s., contains—GENESIS TO NUMBERS.
Volume II., price 21s., contains—DEUTERONOMY TO II. SAMUEL.
Volume III., price 21s., contains—I. KINGS TO ESTHER.
Volume IV., price 21s., contains—JOB TO ISAIAH.
Volume V., price 21s., contains—JEREMIAH TO MALACHI.

THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY FOR ENGLISH READERS.

Edited by the Right Rev. C. J. ELLICOTT, D.D., Lord Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol.

Complete in Three Volumes. Extra crown 4to, 21s. each; or in half-morocco, £4 14s. 6d. the set.
Volume I., price 21s., contains—ST. MATTHEW TO ST. JOHN.
Volume II., price 21s., contains—THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES TO GALATIANS.
Volume III., price 21s., contains—EPHESIANS TO THE REVELATION.

SERMONS PREACHED AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY.
By the Rt. Rev. **ALFRED BARRY, D.D.**, Primate of Australia. 5s.

THE GOSPEL OF THE SECULAR LIFE.
By the Hon. and Rev. **CANON W. H. FREMANTLE.** 5s.

THE CHURCH AT HOME.
By the Right Rev. **ROWLEY HILL, D.D.**, Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man. 5s.

SHORTENED CHURCH SERVICES AND HYMNS.
For Use at Children's Services.
Compiled by the Rev. **T. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE, M.A.** 1s.

SOME DIFFICULTIES OF BELIEF.
By the Rev. **T. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE, M.A.**
7th and Cheap Edition. 2s. 6d.

THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME.
By the Rev. **T. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE.** *Fourth Edition.* 5s.

ST. GEORGE FOR ENGLAND, AND OTHER SERMONS PREACHED TO CHILDREN.
Fourth Edition. By the Rev. **T. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE, M.A.** 5s.

THE LIFE AND WORDS OF CHRIST.
By the Rev. **CUNNINGHAM GEIKIE, D.D.**
Library Edition, Two Vols., 30s. *Students' Edition, Two Vo's.*, 16s.

THE GLORIES OF THE MAN OF SORROWS.
Sermons preached at St. James's, Piccadilly.
By the Rev. **H. G. BONAVIA HUNT.** *New Edition.* 2s. 6d.

SHALL WE KNOW ONE ANOTHER?
By the Right Rev. **J. C. RYLE**, Lord Bishop of Liverpool. 1s.

CASSELL & COMPANY'S COMPLETE CATALOGUE containing *particulars of about* ONE THOUSAND VOLUMES *forwarded post free on application to*
CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED, *Ludgate Hill, London.*